



The Hunt entering Miller's Road c1947

9.5.2/1

FOX HUNTING

In the days when the village community consisted largely of landowners, farmers, farm workers and those working in business and trade connected with agriculture, villagers sought recreation from their local surroundings and in sport that derived from their working environment. Foxes were long seen as predators, causing considerable harm to livestock, particularly poultry and sheep, which in the past were kept in open fields.

Hunting on horseback was an exhilarating sport whilst serving to control the fox population. Supporters followed the Hunt on foot and by car and the gatherings formed a social occasion in themselves as well as generating other events - Hunt Balls and annual Point-to-Point racing being highlights.

The Cambridgeshire Hunt dates from the latter part of the C18. The hunting country embraced Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Middlesex and remained as such until hunting with hounds was abolished by the Hunting Act of 2004. The Cambridgeshire Hunt formed a short-lived amalgamation with that of Enfield Chase (founded 1935) at the beginning of the 2001-2002 season. The last meeting of the Hunt in Toft took place during the 1980s.

Picture captions

9.5.2/1 The Hunt entering Miller's Road c1947

9.5.2/2&3 The Hunt at Toft Green January 1969

9.5.245 & 5 Christmas Hunt and Alison Balcombe 1980s

Alison was the first villager from Toft to join the Cambridgeshire Hunt

9.5.2/6 The last Hunt on Toft Green in the 1980s



9.5.2/2



9.5.2/3



9.5.2/4



9.5.2/5



9.5.2/6

ROUGH SHOOTING

Shooting has always been an activity in country areas when nearly everyone's livelihood depended on what came from farming, the garden and the land. It seems probable that many men living in Toft would have possessed shotguns. These ranged from the 12 bore, 20 bore to the .410 (the folding version was a renowned poacher's special) as well as air rifles and firearms. Their use would have been both legal and illegal.

Landowners and farmers would probably have been quite happy to give permission to shoot vermin that damaged crops particularly rabbits, pigeons, crows and rooks. Some of these would also provide a useful extra source of food. Certainly the large rookeries that existed in the now defunct elm trees would have been shot to control the number of young birds each season.

Around the village itself and the farm buildings in particular sparrows were a major problem and in Toft a 'Sparrow Club' was established 2 February 1903 with the aim of controlling them and having a social atmosphere for the participants. The delicacy for the club meal was sparrow pie.

This type of rough shooting has greatly declined due to the increased mechanization of farming and changes in agricultural practice which has resulted in many fewer people in villages being involved in farming. Pigeon shooting still continues as a skilled sport, and of necessity to limit damage to crops. No bird is a greater enemy of the British farmer than the gentle-looking wood pigeon. Practically all year round it ravages crops; from January to March it settles on fields of clover and sandfoin, moving in on green crops, in particular oil-seed rape, in hard weather; in early spring it feeds on arable fields, taking newly sown grain, peas, charlock and wild mustard; in summer it takes ripe and ripening grain; and in the autumn it stays in the fields, feeding among stubble. By laying its eggs in late summer/early autumn, it raises its young just when the year's harvest is ripening.

Toft Sparrow Club																																																				
<p>First meeting held in School Room Monday May 2 1903</p> <p>Sparrow Club formed.</p> <p>Mr B. Canner & Mr Hawke a managers of same</p> <p>Rate of payment old birds 3^o p dozen young do 2^o do Eggs 1^o do</p> <p>Feb 2/1904 12 birds Price 6^o dozen</p>	<p>Amounts promised towards Sparrow Club at the meeting</p> <table border="1"> <tr><td>Mr Hawke</td><td>P</td><td>50</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr Sam Clark</td><td>P</td><td>26</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr B Canner</td><td>P</td><td>26</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr J Worboys</td><td>P</td><td>26</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr J Dixon</td><td>P</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr B Canner</td><td>P</td><td>26</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr J Worboys</td><td>P</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr J Worboys</td><td>P</td><td>16</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr J Chapman</td><td>P</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr W Radford</td><td>P</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr A. Rabbit</td><td>P</td><td>20</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr J. Rabbit</td><td>P</td><td>50</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr B. Rabbit</td><td>P</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr P. Rabbit</td><td>P</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>Mr P. Rabbit</td><td>P</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="2"></td><td><hr/></td></tr> <tr><td colspan="2"></td><td>140</td></tr> </table>	Mr Hawke	P	50	Mr Sam Clark	P	26	Mr B Canner	P	26	Mr J Worboys	P	26	Mr J Dixon	P	10	Mr B Canner	P	26	Mr J Worboys	P	10	Mr J Worboys	P	16	Mr J Chapman	P	10	Mr W Radford	P	10	Mr A. Rabbit	P	20	Mr J. Rabbit	P	50	Mr B. Rabbit	P	10	Mr P. Rabbit	P	10	Mr P. Rabbit	P	10			<hr/>			140
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9.5.3/1

GAME SHOOTING

The shooting of hares, pheasants, partridges, woodcock and snipe was seen as game shooting where landowners and farmers either as individuals or as a group,

organized shoots with groups of beaters, (often farm workers or village boys) driving birds to the line of guns. There are set seasons when shooting is permitted and times when it is not. Cambridgeshire was renowned in the Thirties for the quality of the partridge shooting. The English, or greyleg partridge, now somewhat rare, were fairly abundant.

Within Toft this type of shooting and the etiquette and social life associated with it has largely died out, although it remains on large estates as a business.

Clay pigeon shooting has also been popular locally. In this sport clay discs are launched from a trap and contestants score points by shooting them using 12 bore shotguns. Toft has produced some successful participants.

FERRETING

Ferretting was another popular village sport. A purse net was placed over each of the rabbit holes in the warren or burrow and a ferret put inside to bolt a rabbit into the net. The job of the ferreter was then to dispatch the rabbit usually by breaking its neck causing instantaneous death. Usually at least two or three people were needed and there could be a lot of digging to recover 'lost' ferrets. The rabbits could be eaten or sold. The advent of myxomatosis in the 1950's and its periodic reoccurrence has put deterred a lot of people from eating rabbit.

Michael and John Quenby



9.5.3/2



9.5.3/3



9.5.3/4



9.5.3/5



9.5.3/6



9.5.3/7



9.5.3/8

Picture captions

9.5.3/1 Sparrow Club accounts

9.5.3/2 Cock pheasant

9.5.3/3 Greyleg Partridge

9.5.3/4 Brown Hare

4 9.3/5 Gundog at work

9.5.3/6 Reg Wood with a bag of 50 wood-pigeons shot over peas at Kingston 13 April 1977

9.5.3/7 Mark Warton Cambridgeshire Shooting Team champion

9.5.3/8 David Warton and bird hide - David has permission to shoot over many hundreds of acres in Toft and the neighbouring villages. His best 'bag' to date is 110 shot over winter wheat on Paul Tebbit's land at Kingston 12 October 2003.